

Moacyr Scliar, 73, Brazilian Who Wrote of Jewish Identity

By WILLIAM GRIMES

Moacyr Scliar, one of Brazil's most celebrated novelists and short-story writers, whose existential allegories explored the complexities of Jewish identity in the Diaspora, died on Feb. 27 in Porto Alegre. He was 73.

The Brazilian Academy of Letters stated on its Web site (academia.org.br), that the cause was complications of a stroke.

Moacyr Scliar (pronounced Mwa-SEAR SKLEER) lived all his life in the city of Porto Alegre, the capital of Brazil's southernmost state, Rio Grande do Sul, to which many Eastern Europeans, like his parents, immigrated in the early 20th century.

The city and its Jewish quarter, Bom Fim, provided him with inexhaustible source material, as did his own preoccupation with the predicament of Jews in Brazil. The protagonist of his best-known novel, "The Centaur in the Garden" (1980), is a Jewish centaur born to Russian immigrant parents.

"At home, you speak Yiddish, eat gefilte fish and celebrate Shabbat," he told the Yiddish Book Center in 2003. "But in the streets, you have soccer, samba and Portuguese. After a while you feel like a centaur."

"Max and the Cats," about a Jewish youth who flees Nazi Germany on a ship carrying wild animals to a Brazilian zoo and, after a shipwreck, ends up sharing a



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Moacyr Scliar in 1999.

lifeboat with a jaguar, achieved fame twice over. Critically praised on its publication in 1981, it touched off a literary storm in 2002 when the Canadian writer Yann Martel won the Man Booker Prize for "Life of Pi," about an Indian youth trapped on a boat with a tiger.

Mr. Martel's admission that he borrowed the idea led to an impassioned debate among writers and critics on the nature of literary invention and the ownership of words and images.

"In a certain way I feel flattered that another writer considered my idea to be so good, but

on the other hand, he used that idea without consulting me or even informing me," Mr. Scliar told *The New York Times*. "An idea is intellectual property."

Moacyr Jaime Scliar was born in March 23, 1937, in Porto Alegre. His parents, who emigrated from Bessarabia in 1919, gave him a Brazilian Indian name in a nod to their new cultural surroundings. After attending both Yiddish and Roman Catholic schools, he obtained a medical degree in 1962 and practiced in the public health service until retiring in 1987.

He is survived by his wife, Judith, and a son, Roberto.

He came to public attention with his second collection of short stories, "The Carnival of the Animals," whose intertwining of allegory, fable, fantasy and folklore and Borges-like excursions into metafiction, marked him as a distinctive new fictional voice.

"The Collected Stories of Moacyr Scliar," rendered into English by his longtime translator Eloah F. Giacomelli, was published by the University of New Mexico Press in 1999.

In many of his novels, Mr. Scliar places a Jewish Brazilian protagonist in a dangerous, bewildering world whose external complexities reverberate in the hero's interior journey of self-discovery. "The War in Bom Fim" (1972), for example, describes the coming of age of a

young Jew in Porto Alegre during World War II and the pull of Zionism.

The central character of "The Strange Nation of Rafael Mendes" (1983) discovers that he is Jewish after finding his late father's mysterious notebooks, which trace the family's history back to Jonah.

"I owe to my Jewish origins the permanent feeling of wonderment that is inherent to the immigrant and the cruel, bitter and sad humor that through the centuries has served to protect Jews against despair," Mr. Scliar told the reference work *World Authors* in 1991. "It is at the level of language, however, that these impulses are able to produce their effects. It is in language that I have faith, as a vehicle for aesthetic expression and also — and above all else — as an instrument for changing the world in which we live."

Deaths

Cassell, Warren	Liebross, Harold	Menzies
Kleinman, Hyman	Liebross, Ruth	Stor
Lerer, Shifra	Lipton, Brian	
Lewis, Richard	Mcmanus, James	

CASSELL—Warren, Stellar bookseller, avid tennis player, volunteer, and community activist Warren Cassell died on February 25th, in Portland, Oregon of heart failure. In addition to his wife of 46 years, Melissa, Mr. Cassell is survived by his daughter, two sons, and two grandsons.

LIEBROSS—Died peacefully on Feb. 20, 2010, after a long illness. He was the father of Diana Steiner and the brother-in-law of Ruth Liebross. He always re